

The City of Plattsburgh

Snow Removal Advisory Committee



**Report to the Common Council
August 27, 2015**

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About the Snow Removal Advisory Committee

In January of 2015, the City of Plattsburgh Common Council unanimously established the Snow Removal Advisory Committee with the following resolution:

Whereas public input is important to the process of solving this problem, and citizen advisory committees are a valuable means of enhancing dialogue through the exchange of perspectives from diverse stakeholders, especially those who rely upon sidewalks,

Whereas advisory bodies are able to focus on a single issue, and are able to provide, through research, recommendations to City Government in a timely fashion; therefore

Be it Resolved that the City of Plattsburgh Common Council authorizes the establishment of a Snow Removal Advisory Committee, charged with the task to research immediate and long range solutions for pedestrian access on City sidewalks and to summarize that research and present their findings and recommendations to the Common Council. The committee of up to ten individuals will be comprised of citizen stakeholders representing a variety of perspectives of City residents who rely on sidewalks. The citizen stakeholders should include a senior, disabled citizen, youth, non-driver, property owner, business owner, school administrator or health professional. . .

The following members have served on the committee and respectfully submit their findings.

Nancy Allen, Property Owner
Rachelle Armstrong, City Councilor
Lonnie Fairchild, Retired Educator
Stephen Graph, Educator/Librarian

John Haubner, Retired Educator
Steve Krieg, Optometrist
Jeff Moore, Property Owner, Former Local Mayor
Sandra McNeil, Health Care Professional
Linda Noyes, Retired Educator

The Snow Removal Advisory Committee
would like to thank Debra Buell who contributed
to this report with her research and writing.

Overview

Sidewalks are an important part of the transportation system that helps people move between home, school, work, public places, shopping, services, and recreation.

Usable sidewalks that are maintained in good condition throughout the year are the hallmark of a well-run municipality that is concerned with the health and wellbeing of all of its residents. Sidewalks should be given a maintenance priority on par with the roads, since, especially in winter, they are equally important in enabling all residents to move safely around the city. When sidewalks are not shoveled, pedestrians who must walk on the streets are at risk.

The current system, under which each individual property owner bears complete responsibility for clearing the adjacent sidewalk, has been ineffective because of what the committee regards as its inherent inefficiencies.

- The current enforcement system does not achieve its desired goal—clear sidewalks.
- It breaks up a single job into many unrelated and uncoordinated pieces.
- It does not make possible the use of larger snow clearing and de-icing equipment better suited to the job.
- It does not provide for a usable connection between the sidewalks and the roads.
- An entire block can become inaccessible when one portion or the corners are not clear.
- While improvements can be made in enforcement procedures, the other problems will remain.
- Compliance with the code is difficult for property owners who cannot personally remove snow. Limited reliable options for professional snow removal are available.
- Property owners are generally not equipped to remove snow/ice removal to the standards required by the city.
- Some property owners have difficulty removing snow because of advanced age, physical disabilities, unreliable help, out-of-the-area travel, and/or limited time and resources.

This report has three parts:

Part One demonstrates the feasibility of the city assuming complete sidewalk snow removal operations.

We provide information that has been collected from municipalities in our area. We favor this solution and recommend that the city begin to take steps to implement it so that it can become functional by the winter of 2016-2017.

Part Two evaluates the City Code: “Streets and Sidewalks 233-30—233.36, Article V, Removal of Snow and Ice on Public Sidewalks [LL2007-11]” and suggests changes.

We suggest revising the code to make it more effective and enforceable. We also suggest that the City conduct a campaign to notify property-owners of the procedures and changes.

Part Three affirms and supports the importance of sidewalks.

City sidewalks are valuable assets, worthy of the effort required to implement an effective and lasting system for winter sidewalk maintenance.

Part One

The Committee Demonstrates the Feasibility of The City of Plattsburgh Assuming All Snow Removal Operations

In Clinton County, Champlain and Rouses Point have been providing municipal sidewalk snow clearance for many years for just the cost of equipment and without using additional staff. Other communities in our region have also assumed operations to clear sidewalks in an affordable manner.

Committee members have consulted several of the *Department of Public Works* supervisors involved in order to explore the feasibility of the city taking over **all** snow removal operations. We believe that Plattsburgh can, in an effective and affordable manner, assume responsibility for winter maintenance for all the sidewalks, a responsibility that is currently assigned to property landowners.

We provide the following information in order to demonstrate that neighboring communities have implemented workable snow removal systems in order to provide accessible, safe sidewalks to their residents year round.

We must carefully note that all statistics are approximate, that salt and sand costs are indeterminate, and that newer and more versatile (possibly useful in other seasons) equipment is available.

Municipal Sidewalk Snow Removal: Five Profiles

Burlington, Vermont

- The city has 150 miles of sidewalk
- There are 9 sidewalk plow routes; each route is assigned a plow vehicle
- It takes 7-8 hours to clear sidewalks once; they are cleared twice
- Hours to blow all sidewalks: 24.
- Hours to salt all sidewalks: 8--12

Champlain, New York

- The village has approximately 6 to 8 miles of sidewalk.
- After a snowfall, one staff member removes the snow in 2.5 hours, including salting and sanding.
- One “trackless” machine with V plow, blower attachment, salter/sander is used.

Falconer, New York

- Town has 22.5 miles of sidewalk
- Snow removal is completed by one employee in approximately 6 hours
- Town has one plow machine with a blower attachment

Middlebury, Vermont

- Middlebury has 18 miles of sidewalks.
- Clean up during and after a storm conducted by one temporary worker in 16- 30 hours.
- A machine-driven snow blower is utilized. The same machine has a broom with water tank attachment for summer use.
- Lease cost for back-up tractor was \$6,165.
- The Town of Middlebury recently voted to purchase more equipment in order to clean sidewalks in a timelier manner. A seasonal worker will be hired.
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Rouses Point, New York

- The village has 20 --22 miles of sidewalk (approximately one third the 65 miles of Plattsburgh sidewalk).
- After a snowfall, one person completes sidewalk snow-removal within 8-10 hours, including salting and sanding, depending on the severity of the storm.
- Current staff completes the work – no additional staff is needed.
- The current equipment is one “trackless” machine with V plow, blower attachment, and a salter/sander.

Projected Costs

The committee estimated the costs of the City taking over operations, projecting figures on the high side in order to leave implementation details open. Assuming a system based on hiring seasonal employees to operate three machines, we calculated costs as follow.

- **Staff:**
 - Three (3) seasonal workers for four (4) months @ \$12.32/hr
 - X 40 hrs X 18 weeks = \$26,611.20
 - + 7.65% SS = \$2,035.76
 - + 10.4% NYS retirement = \$2,767.56
 - + 5% NYS Workman's Compensation = \$1,350.56.
 - = \$32,745.08 total employee costs for 18 weeks.
 - While most other communities in our area do not hire additional winter employees for sidewalk clearing, this could be an option, if there is other work to keep them busy when they are not needed for sidewalk clearing.
- **Equipment:**
 - Three (3) trackless machines @ \$145,000
 - X three (3) units / twenty (20) years
 - = \$21,750.00 annually in debt service.
 - + \$4,350,00 for operating and maintenance costs (20% of machine costs)
 - = \$26,100 for total yearly equipment cost
 - Substantial cost savings could be obtained if it were feasible to utilize the new articulating frontend loaders from Hollister or John Deere. This equipment would also have the potential to be employed for other tasks when not being used for snow removal.
- **Total cost estimate** = \$58,740.00 per year
- **Cost to property owners:** Annual cost to a taxable parcel would be \$11.95 per year.

	\$32,640.00	for employee costs (\$6.66 per parcel)
+	\$21,750.00	for debt service on the equipment purchase
	\$4,350.00	operating and maintenance costs
	<hr/>	
=	\$58,740.00	per year/4916 taxable parcels = \$11.95 per year \$1.00 per month.

Sharing costs among property owners through a fee for service

Considering problematic budgetary forecasts in the upcoming year, the committee has explored creative ways of funding this investment in the City's quality of life. Perhaps, rather than funding snow removal in the Department of Public Works budget, a "Fee for Service" might be charged to property owners, the segment of our community who is currently responsible for sidewalk maintenance as set down in the current City Code. This service charge could be sent to property owners in their tax bills.

While we realize that the plan for assuming sidewalk snow removal operations would necessitate an amendment to the City Charter, and further, that establishing a fee for service would need to be approved by the council as well, we believe it is fair to distribute these very reasonable costs among the entire tax base of the city, since the entire city will benefit.

The Snow Removal Advisory Committee recommends that the City of Plattsburgh assume all operations for sidewalk snow and ice removal.

Part Two

Revise Article V of the City Code

The committee evaluated Article V of the City Code, “Removal of Snow and Ice on Public Sidewalks [LL2007-11].” The committee believes that the current city code is flawed. Therefore, it recommends that it be revised for the following reasons.

- The current code does not provide a system for fair and consistent enforcement. Because it is driven by complaints to city government, it is inherently restrictive and its application is inconsistent and unfair.
- The multiple steps and communications complicate the process of enforcement. The process needs to be streamlined.
- The city has a duty to enact the law in order to be in compliance with ADA Regulations.
- The committee believes that citizens are not generally aware of the city code regarding sidewalk snow removal. For this reason, a comprehensive public awareness campaign about the city code should be planned and implemented. The campaign should involve repetitive messaging over a four month window (November through February) and include multiple platforms, possibly including print, social media, city website, radio, and television. Notification could also be included in utility or property tax billings.

The Snow Removal Advisory Committee recommends that until citywide sidewalk snow removal operations are approved and implemented, Article V of the City Code should be revised and enforced. The committee has prepared a set of possible revisions to the city code and has given them to Councilor Armstrong who will present them to the Common Council.

Part Three

Sidewalks Are Integral to City Operations, Citizen Movement, and Economic Growth

The Committee Asserts that Sidewalks and Streets Are of *Equal* Value to Roadways

Sidewalks Have Economic, Environmental, and Cultural Value

We recognize that our history is a unique and invaluable asset. Because historic tourism is a Destination Master Plan goal, safe, clean and attractive sidewalks are of paramount importance. Sidewalks allow locals and tourists to walk, get to work, worship, meet, patronize businesses, exercise, recreate, and see the sights. At some point, everyone is a pedestrian.

We recognize that sidewalks are important to local, regional and state development and planning for the future. Our community vision includes interconnected streets, sidewalks, trails, and public transportation with pathways leading locals and visitors from the waterfront to city center, to shops, museums, restaurants, cultural events, and government centers.

Walk-able sidewalks that can be used all year long provide a consistent pathway to commerce and citizen activities, and they also project the image of a future-thinking city. They connect people to community resources, as well as to one another. Sidewalks unify separate districts into a greater whole, producing a sense of community cohesion and solidarity.

Providing Maintained and Safe Sidewalks Promotes Individual and Environmental Health

Maintaining walk-able sidewalks year round promotes health and safety. We believe in a community that offers safe routes to schools and the work place. A commitment to keeping our sidewalks useful and clean throughout the year, contributes to a healthier community. When community members walk instead of relying upon cars, we create a healthier planet by reducing carbon emissions.

The importance of intermodal transportation options and amenities is enumerated in regional studies, plans, projects, and grants that include, but are not limited to:

- Saranac River Trail Feasibility Study,
- Plattsburgh Brownfield Opportunity area study
- Velocity: 2013 North Country Regional Economic Council Progress Report
- Essex and Clinton Counties Waterfront Plan
- New York Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (2013 to 2017 Report)
- New York State Dept. of Transportation 2014 Capital Budget Presentation
- New York State Dept. of Transportation Complete Streets programs (adopted by the State Legislature 2011)
- The Main Street Facade Improvement Projects
- Community Development Public Infrastructure
- Block Grants
- Way finding Stations through the New York State Dept. of Transportation
- Lake Champlain Trail
- Local Waterfront Revitalization Program
- Strand Theater and Arts Center
- First Weekends
- Battle of Plattsburgh
- Mayor's Cup
- Adirondack Coast
- Farmer's Market
- Clinton County Health Dept. Building Healthy Neighborhoods Grants
- Lake Champlain Bikeways
- New York Main Street Grants through the Dept. of Housing and Community Renewal

We agree that if we are to adequately plan for the future, we must develop a comprehensive, deeply integrated network of intermodal transportation systems based on a sustainable whole-systems approach, which provide equal access to transportation options for all users. This type of planning is attractive to large grant providers such as the New York State Department of State and the Department of Transportation.

We recognize that over one-third of Americans do not drive, a figure that is increasing as our population ages. Transportation choice and accessibility are issues of social equity. The elderly, minorities, and children represent a disproportionate number of those with limited transportation choices. When walking (as well as other affordable transportation options such as biking and public transit) is not sufficiently safe, significant negative consequences can result: social and economic isolation and decline and poor health.

Because we recognize that the City of Plattsburgh has been rated the number one micropolitan area in North America, **we agree** that it is in the city's interest to become a recognized "fit friendly community" as well. Plattsburgh should strive to achieve measurable positive health outcomes and can do so by implementing safe, human powered transportation choices that foster significant improvements to its citizens' health.

We recognize that recent surveys, such as the National Association of Realtors and Smart Growth Surveys, indicate that buyers prefer **walk-able**, mixed-use communities when selecting where to live. We agree that such communities offer enhanced individual and community economic vitality. The long-term relationship with realtors in the development of PARC thoroughly established the need to keep these preferences and goals in mind.

We find it very compelling that travel by foot and bicycle represents money retained in the community as demonstrated by a 2010 case study by the University of Massachusetts. This study compared the employment impacts of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure with traditional roadway projects and found that street bike lanes and pedestrian measures created more direct jobs, more indirect jobs, and more induced jobs per dollar than either road upgrades or road resurfacing.

We recognize that Governor Andrew M. Cuomo signed the Complete Streets Act ([Chapter 398, Laws of New York](#)) on August 15, 2011, requiring state, county and local agencies to consider the convenience and mobility of all users when developing transportation projects that receive state and federal funding.

Conclusion

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Snow Removal Advisory Committee recommends that:

1. The City of Plattsburgh should assume operations for sidewalk snow and ice removal from all sidewalks.
2. In the interim, the current Code should be revised and enforcement should be implemented.